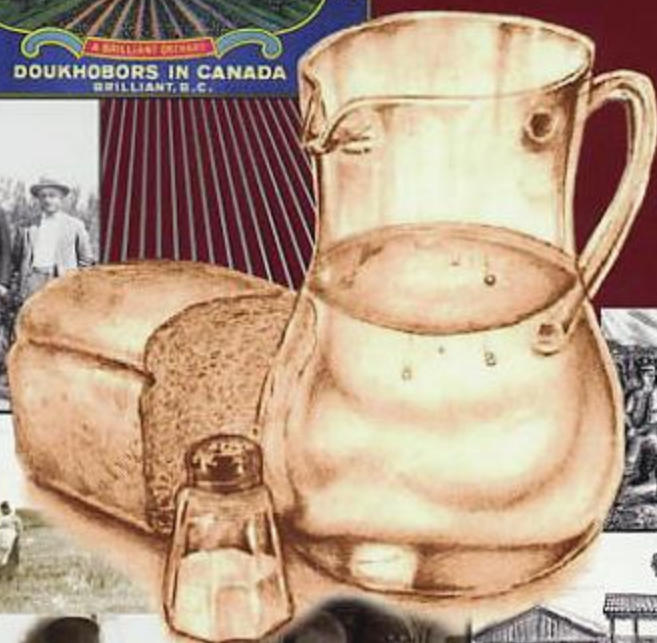


Spirit Wrestlers:

Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living



Koozma J. Tarasoff



From Generation to Generation - Passing on Traditional Values

Alex A. Ewashen; Larry A. Ewasen; Robert A. Ewashen

Alex Ewashen (1932-2019) tells of his Russian family roots and his involvement in the Doukhobor movement along with his brothers Larry (1940-2025) and Robert (1936-). For much of his professional career, Alex was an auctioneer residing in the Creston valley of British Columbia. When the Cold War threatened the world, in 1984 Alex joined a small group of Quaker, Doukhobor and other concerned individuals in a three-month 50,000 km Friendship Caravan International trip traveling by car through Europe and North America. His Irish wife Julie, a nurse by profession, supports his efforts and participated with him in the 1995 Doukhobor Centennial Choir Tour of North America and Russia. Larry resides in Castlegar, BC and his wife is Dr Galina Alexeeva, Head of Academic Research at Yasnaya Polyana, the State Museum of Leo Tolstoy in Russia. Robert, now retired, lives with his Jamaican-born wife Enid, a teacher, in Creston, BC. Their sister Agnes, better known as Abbe, a talented singer, died in 2002, born 1943.



Ewashen Family in Russia 1899. Left to right: John Ewashen (brother to Jacob), Jacob Ewashen, great grandfather Jacob, John Kooznetsoff (great grandmother's brother), great grandmother nee Kooznetsoff, and Mary Stoopnikoff (John and Jacob's sister).

Our Ewashen family's involvement with Doukhoborism has been traced back to 1794. The Ewashens were allotment peasants belonging to the Tsar's family; they were given land for their own use. They lived in the village of Rusanovka, Tambovskaya Gubernia.

In 1801 Emperor Alexander I allowed Doukhobors to resettle in Tavria in the Milky Waters, but when the allotment peasants asked to be resettled with their brethren in 1804, they were not given permission. In 1824 they were refused again. Finally in 1842, Great, Great, Great Grandfather Stepan Nikiforovich Ewashen and his wife Anphimia Rodionovna with their son Ivan were able to reunite with the Doukhobors in the Caucasus, and settled in the Village of Slavyanka, Elizavetpol Gubernia.

In 1853 Great, Great Grandfather Ivan Stepanovich lived with wife and son Yakov in Slavyanka. In 1899 Great Grandfather Yakov migrated to Canada, according to the ship's manifest at the age of 43. There is a discrepancy here, if he was born in 1853 he would have been 46 years of age. He arrived with two sons, our Grandfather Jacob (Yakov), Great Uncle John (Ivan) and daughter Maria. His destination was the village of Terpenie in the Rosthern area of Saskatchewan. Here, from the very beginning, he was appointed headman. In an interview with an American journalist in 1900, and in a subsequent publication of a journal entitled *A Day With the Doukhobors*, the journalist was most impressed by Jacob's intellect and grasp of affairs, and natural grace

and dignity. In 1906 the Ewashens relocated to the village of Perehodnoe, near Arran on the Manitoba border. With the loss of the Doukhobor lands in Saskatchewan, they moved to Brilliant BC settling in the Village of Sion in 1913. Great Grandfather died in his early sixties and is buried in Lundbreck, Alberta.

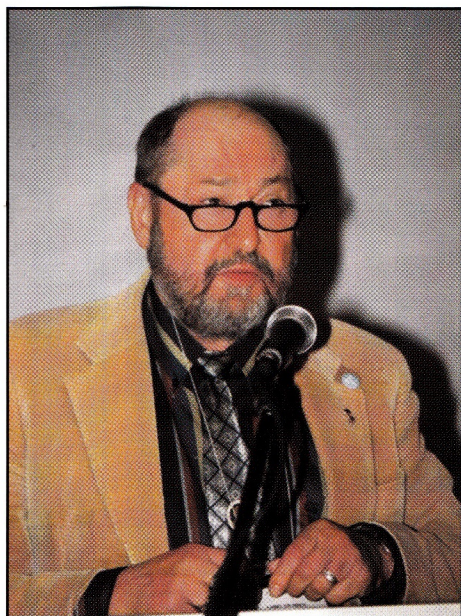
Grandfather Jacob and family initially lived in Brilliant. In his early manhood he became a very competent steam engineer, obtaining his Traction Engineer's Final Certificate at the age of 26. He was spending so much time away from home in Alberta and Saskatchewan breaking the virgin soil, that when the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood acquired land in the Cowley-Lundbreck area in 1916, Peter V. Verigin relocated the Ewashen family to Lundbreck, Alberta. They settled in a village just south of town known as the Riley Place. In the Doukhobor community it was called the Stoopnikoff Village. Five years or so later, the Jacob Ewashen left the CCUB and began to farm independently. Grandfather died in December 1968 at the age of 86, and was buried at Nanton, Alberta.

Great Uncle John Evashen ended up moving to the Godsall Ranch, three miles south of Cowley. John devoted his life to the CCUB, serving it with honour to its very end. For a time he operated the Grain Elevator and Flour Mill in Lundbreck, and later in the 1930s he was Secretary and Assistant Treasurer for the Alberta division of the CCUB. When the Community was getting into dire financial circumstances and all its horses were going to be repossessed, Uncle John went to a friend, Dan Wihnan, a Department of Public Works foreman, and borrowed \$3000 to keep this from happening. Dan was an honourable man too, and understood the circumstances. Years later, when Dan's heir started pressing Uncle John for repayment of the loan, he asked the Doukhobor community for help. When he was refused, he paid it off himself. Great Uncle John passed away in 1972 at the age of 85, and is buried at the Doukhobor cemetery in Lundbreck, Alberta.

Our mother's side of the family is steeped in Doukhobor history. Peter V. Verigin was her father's uncle. As could be expected, Grandfather Peter P. Verigin was a devoted follower of Peter Lordly, and in the CCUB he was the bee keeper, looking after 600 bee hives. Upon Lordly's assassination in 1924, the immediate Verigin family chose to leave the CCUB and settle in Shouldice, Alberta, in a community established by Anastasia Lordly who was Lordly's companion since his arrival in Canada.

The community consisted of 500 followers, established on 1260 acres, and was called the 'Lordly Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood'. The Community disbanded in the early 1930s, but Anastasia and her immediate group lived out their lives there into the 1960s. Many of her followers, including Grandfather and family, relocated to Mission, BC. Grandfather Verigin passed away on 18 January 1959 at the age of 69, and is buried in Mission, BC.

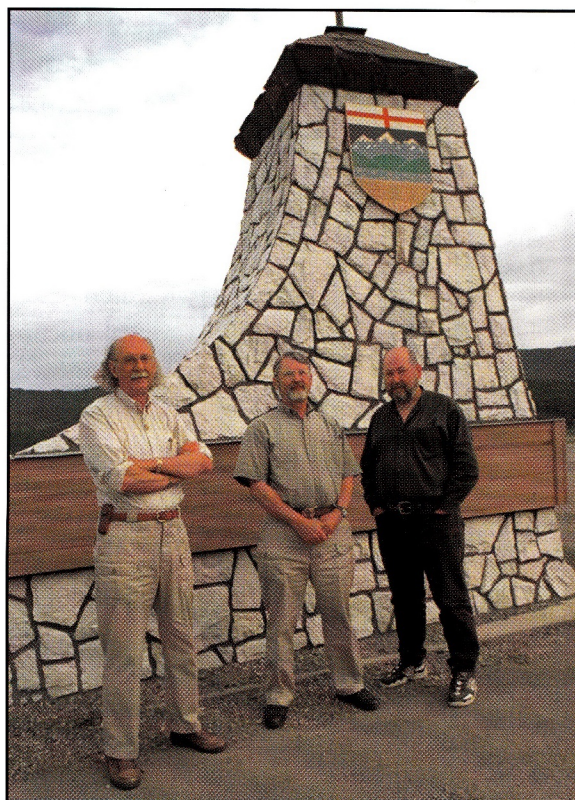
Our father Alex Jacob Ewashen and his sons, Alex, Robert and Larry have kept up the Ewashen tradition of Doukhobor involvement, now dating back close to 200 years. In this generation, Larry has been the most involved, dedicating the greater part of his adult life to the nurturing of the Doukhobor ideal and the preservation



Larry A. Ewashen speaks at a conference in Ottawa, 1999.

of its history. Dad preferred to work behind the scenes. In the Cowley-Lundbreck area where we grew up he was instrumental in building the Doukhobor Community Home in Lundbreck. I can remember going from farm to farm with him when he was soliciting funds for the project. He was active in the formation of the Cowley-Lundbreck Doukhobor Society of Alberta, comprised of members of all groups. In 1945 he was the Alberta delegate to a convention held in Grand Forks, BC, for the formation of the Union of Doukhobors of Canada. After the early death of his wife, Mary, he dedicated his life to the raising of the children and managed to insure that they all received a higher level of academic education: Robert received his Master's degree from Columbia University in New York in addition to other studies, Larry graduated with an Honour's Master of Arts from Case-Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, after initial studies at the U of A. Abbe studied at Mount Royal College in Calgary, while Alex went into partnership with Dad on the farm, and later studied auctioneering, becoming a prominent, successful auctioneer in Creston.

For more than a dozen years, Robert and Larry have been actively involved in the Canadian Doukhobor Society. Robert used his talents as an



Ewashen brothers of British Columbia at the BC-Alberta border. Left to right: Alex, Bob, and Larry. 1999.

On 12 February 1984, at the height of the Cold War and the nuclear threat, Alex Ewashen and a group of concerned citizens left Vancouver Airport on a 50,000 km Peace and Friendship Caravan International through Europe. In an interview with CBC-TV, Alex said: 'It's absolutely imperative that every individual tries to do something to alleviate the terrible situation that the world is in today, if something does go to hell, as it might, and I hope it doesn't, at least I can say I tried, I tried to do something.'

It took Sigurd Askevold, a Creston High School teacher and Quaker, three years and over 2000 letters to organize the trip. An ardent pacifist all his life, this was his retirement project. The Honourary sponsor was Dr Linus Pauling, the 1962 Nobel Peace Prize winner, and the official sponsor was the Argenta Friends (Quakers) Monthly Meeting, Argenta, BC. The Quakers, the Doukhobors, the Mennonites, and the Moderator of the United Church of Canada endorsed the mission. The group traveled by cars through 22 countries in Europe. The sojourn lasted three months. The message was clear. Mass 'billeted' student exchanges must be done if exchanges were to be of any value (no better way to get to know your 'so called enemy'), and the twinning of cities. (For example, the city of Aalborg, Denmark had 19 sister cities around the world with a constant interchange of activities).

In spite of his demanding career, Alex said 'to this day I cannot understand how I could have imposed such a responsibility on my wife Julie, to run the business in my absence. I had met Sigurd on the steps of the local Creston Post Office, and he said that he had to confirm details of the trip within the next two hours whether or not I was going. The decision was made within that time.'

Educational Councilor in facilitating workshops on present day Doukhoborism and its future. I have recently completed my third term as President of the Canadian Doukhobor Society. All three of us are Lifetime Honourary Members of the Kootenay Doukhobor Historical Society.

Larry's life and work has been connected with theatre, films and music (both inside and outside the Doukhobor community) in the USA, Canada, Russia, England and Scotland. Besides teaching and performing, Larry devoted time to the research of Doukhobor history which culminated in the production of the major historical documentary, *In Search of Utopia, The Doukhobors* (1981). The film was widely shown in Canada and the USA and presented at the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. This film and his many other historical materials in the form of tapes, books and videos are housed in the Public Archives in Ottawa and Regina. In 1991-1992, Larry paid a tribute to Nick Kalmakoff of Canora, Saskatchewan, with the production of the film *The Last Hurrah*, portraying a Canadian pioneer and collector of Doukhobor music. Along the way there were books and other video productions created dealing with Canadian ethnic heritage.

In 1993, Larry was in Moscow on behalf of the Canadian Bureau of International Education on a cultural project which involved research and writing a play about the Doukhobor immigration. Here he was received by many prominent Russian theatre directors and actors which later culminated in workshops in Vancouver with Alexei Batalov, Oscar winning actor (*Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*). He was invited to the Kootenay Doukhobor Historical Society in Castlegar, where he is now the Curator of the Doukhobor Village Museum.



Left, a view of the inner court at the reconstructed Kootenay Doukhobor Historic Village Museum, Castlegar, BC, 1998, where Larry is curator.

Right, another view of the inner courtyard in reconstructed Doukhobor village where a traditional Doukhobor rug lies on a table in the foreground.



Below, modules from the Canadian Museum of Civilization on the Doukhobors now on display at the museum in Castlegar, BC.



In addition, until 2002, Larry has been CDS secretary and publisher of its quarterly newsletter The Sheaf. Brother Bob has taken over the role of editor. Here is a poem that Larry composed in honour of Doukhobor pioneers:

Remembering The Spirit Wrestlers

by Larry A. Ewashen

The Spirit Wrestlers - Wrestling with the Spirit within -
And forced to wrestle with the spirit without -
Resist not evil
When 'resist not' became greater resistance than most could bear
Not afraid of death, the penal battalions, the scorpy acacia -
The knotted knout and metal manacles -
Not afraid of death - more important - not afraid of life -
The song of ages fashioned in a mystical a cappella
Not afraid to start again, and again, and again
Betrayed by a faceless, sinister, soulless bureaucracy -
Our ancestors played the major role
Not for the dollar - but for the spirit
They sang the song of perseverance and hardship
Spanning the Canadian century of the pioneer -
A century that saw people plowing, pulling wagons
Then oxen - eight horse teams - the steam engine - the tractor -
Finally
The plane and the missile and the star wars terror -
These were the pioneers that would not be beaten when they were -
Or merely consumed as captives of the soulless present
Let us try to capture this solitary song -
Now a light in our memories -
The memories of wind swept prairies -
The lonely expanse between villages -
The lonely stretches between success and failure
Scarred swollen hands that worked too hard
They heard it all - they wrote it as they went
But our memory is dimming -
Is it time to recall - to rediscover?
To reclaim what they gave so selflessly -
In the hopes of a better, peaceful life than which they found - ?
Is it time to resurrect as we remember?
The strangers in a strange country building a land they would no longer know
No thought of reward except the light in their children's eyes
Secure as dreamers in a humble humility of a time gone by
Let us celebrate, and let us remember,
Let us listen to the echo - then
Let us try to recapture and regain
These ancient songs gone by...

The original Doukhobor Village Museum web site:

<http://kics.bc.ca/doukhobormuseum/index.htm>

is archived at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20020814193355/http://kdhs.kics.bc.ca/index.htm>

The Big Issue?

What is the Big Issue in life? For the Doukhobors, the 1895 Arms Burning was a big issue, as was the notion of the God Within. These were new views, new visions of the world, a paradigm shift in how we view the world. They opened up another perspective and an enlarged awareness as if it was from the top of the Himalayan Mountain, the Mount Everest of the universe. Today these Big Issues are still relevant and fresh as ever. They remain as a reawakening and a reinventing of ourselves to new possibilities.

Spirit Wrestlers: Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living

When Koozma J. Tarasoff first edited a Doukhobor journal in Saskatchewan in the early 1950s, he never thought that his life path would lead him to a broad study of his Slavic roots. Now, 50 years later, *Spirit Wrestlers: Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living* is his most ambitious creation with 700 select photos and a multi-media CD-ROM.



Through the stories of the pioneers from the time of Lev N. Tolstoy to the present, Tarasoff draws out the colourful thread of creative and caring humanity. Whatever your profession – farmer, business person, teacher, builder, actor, doctor, athlete, cook, diplomat, or community worker – you will need skills of development and survival.

Hard work, innovation, bridge-building, non-violence, hospitality, co-operation, and the revolutionary inner spirit are important resources for us as individuals and members of society. These resources are valuable strategies for living that we can use today and in the future.

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